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SUBJECT: EMBASSY BANGKOK CONCERNS OVER ACES DATABASE

REF: A. 2005 JAKARTA 9962

- [1](#)B. 2005 JAKARTA 2322
- [1](#)C. 2005 STATE 131486
- [1](#)D. 2005 STATE 21314
- [1](#)E. 2003 STATE 34981

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. After careful review at post, Embassy Bangkok believes the Abuse Case Evaluation System (ACES) database falls short of its announced goal (reftel C) of being a tool to "facilitate the management of human rights abuse allegations and compliance with the Leahy amendment guidelines". ACES today is filled with entries that complicate the Leahy vetting process by being so cumbersome that it makes it more difficult in some instances to determine whether an individual or military unit is guilty of gross human rights violations. Current guidance encourages posts to input data "even if there is some doubt about the credibility of the information," rather than using the "credible evidence" standard spelled out in the Leahy Amendment. This present standard could easily lead to misleading, even false information being entered into the system. Post offers some suggestions about ways to improve quality control for ACES. END SUMMARY.

THIS IS ACES TODAY

[1](#)2. (SBU) The standards for implementing the Leahy Amendment are laid out in Reftel E, which states that no funds can be made available "to any unit of a foreign country's security forces if the Secretary of State has credible evidence that such unit has committed gross human rights violations." When ACES was launched, Embassies were told that it would be a useful tool to determine whether a police or military unit is guilty of gross human rights violations by compiling reports from post reporting, the media, NGOs, and others about alleged human rights abuses. In July (Reftel C), we were advised that users at post and in the Department would be able to enter and comment on allegations put into ACES and that DRL would validate all reports. Today, ACES is up and running, yet there seem to be quality control issues regarding the information that is placed into ACES. The following examples, taken from entries already in the ACES database, illustrate this problem:

--An entry about an Indonesian maid who was beaten by her private employer in Saudi Arabia (Comment. The employer is not a member of the security forces);
--A group of Burmese soldiers who stole 5 sacks of rice from local villagers;
--A police officer who took a \$108 bribe in Nigeria;
--The killing of villagers by unnamed anti-government (FARC) rebels in Colombia. (The FARC is not a part of the Colombian security forces.)

[1](#)3. (SBU) None of these entries are listed in ACES in a manner that would assist an officer conducting Leahy Amendment human rights vetting because they don't concern possible recipients of USG funding. Further, many of the entries cited above were entered by an anonymous author known only as "ACESMAN". Users are therefore unable to check with the source of the reports for clarification. Although ACES is a classified database, we understand from the Department that individuals in the field, in the Department, and in other agencies will have access to it. Conceivably, anyone with ACES access can, at their own discretion, enter data that could prevent the training of a foreign military or police unit, perhaps even years after the initial data was entered.

THE CREDIBLE EVIDENCE STANDARD

[1](#)4. (SBU) ACES is designed to assist us in determining whether there is "credible evidence" that a vetted individual or unit has committed a gross human rights violation. However, the ACES instructions seem to require a less exacting standard for putting information into the ACES database than is called for by the Leahy Amendment. Reftel B

states that "even if there is some doubt about the credibility of an allegation, post should enter it into ACES". This guidance was reaffirmed by Department officials at the September 27 Human Rights Conference presentation, which is linked to the homepage for ACES, in which we are told that "entering reports known to be false IS appropriate". We understand that one underlying purpose of entering "unsubstantiated" cases into ACES is to prevent future redundancies when new vetting officers track down rumors that turn out to be unsubstantiated. However, without clarifying more precisely what type of questionable cases should be entered into ACES, the guidance as it stands leaves open considerable potential for the system to be literally flooded with irrelevant material. Over time, this runs the risk of making ACES a less usable, and useful tool to distinguish the true Leahy cases from the superfluous ones.

15. (SBU) Embassy Bangkok recommends that the Department redefine the standard of what is and is not acceptable for entry into the database as "credible evidence". The first webpage on ACES states: "This system exists to manage serious human rights abuse allegations that are seen as reasonably credible by the Department of State". Returning to this "reasonably credible" standard might be a good starting point.

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THE LOWER THE STANDARD, THE HIGHER THE PRICETAG
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16. (SBU) As our colleagues in Jakarta recently pointed out (reftels A and B), effectively using ACES might require additional resources in a number of posts. In the case of Bangkok, to improve quality control at our post, we propose to vet entries with an informal committee of interested sections / agencies and limit entries to the ACES officers in the POL section. This will ensure that we access all information at post about each case, and hopefully prevent the entry of questionable information such as the cases listed in paragraph 2.

17. (U) Embassy Bangkok appreciates Department's consideration of our suggestions.
BOYCE